

Consultation question 1: Do you agree with our proposals for adding requirements to the Television Technical Code and Digital Radio Technical Code relating to resilience of broadcast networks and access services?

By way of context, News Broadcasting uses digital terrestrial broadcast networks to distribute all of its television and radio services to audiences in the UK; and while we do not operate any DTT multiplexes, we do operate several DAB radio multiplexes.

From the perspective of a service provider on a commercial DTT multiplex and several DAB radio multiplexes, we would support proposals that strengthened the resilience of broadcast networks. However, we would be concerned that as a consequence of these proposals the bill for engineering in such resilience into these networks was passed on to us via higher capacity charges. We are therefore wary that in seeking to strengthen obligations on multiplex licensees, Ofcom's proposals may have some adverse, unintended consequences on service providers.

From our perspective as a DAB multiplex licensee, we note Ofcom's proposed changes to the Digital Radio Technical Code:

New paragraph 2.11: "... Licensees should therefore consider the technical resilience of their service, and to have in place service continuity plans that are proportionate to the service they are providing."

We would note that key aspects of network resilience are baked in to networks during their design phase. Once in operation, changing network architecture and re-engineering in redundancy becomes harder and more expensive.

On top of this, we would further note that outside the performance and resilience of our individual DAB multiplex networks, each of these networks hangs off core infrastructure owned and operated mostly by Arqiva. Irrespective of the resilience we may specify at a DAB multiplex level (i.e. specifying dual drive as opposed to single drive transmitters for example), we are almost completely at the mercy of the UK's broadcast transmission services provider, Arqiva, to ensure that its shared infrastructure systems perform, and that it reinvests so that resilience is maintained in these shared infrastructure systems over time.

As chance would have it, Arqiva is currently in the process of refreshing its core DAB network. This programme of work is expected to be complete sometime in 2024 and is expected to significantly enhance the resilience of DAB multiplex networks operated by Arqiva. However, this is the first such capital investment programme we are aware of Arqiva undertaking on its DAB infrastructure since the introduction of DAB in the 1990's. In some respects therefore, this investment is long overdue. However, if this investment programme was not under way, there are very few levers that we could pull to compel Arqiva undertake such a capital programme. Ofcom's proposals do not acknowledge this. Nor do they give licensees any tools to practically address this.

Given the above, News Broadcasting therefore considers that Ofcom's proposals relating to resilience of broadcast networks, as conceived, are incorrectly targeted and too undefined to have any real effect without potentially adding to the bills of content providers.

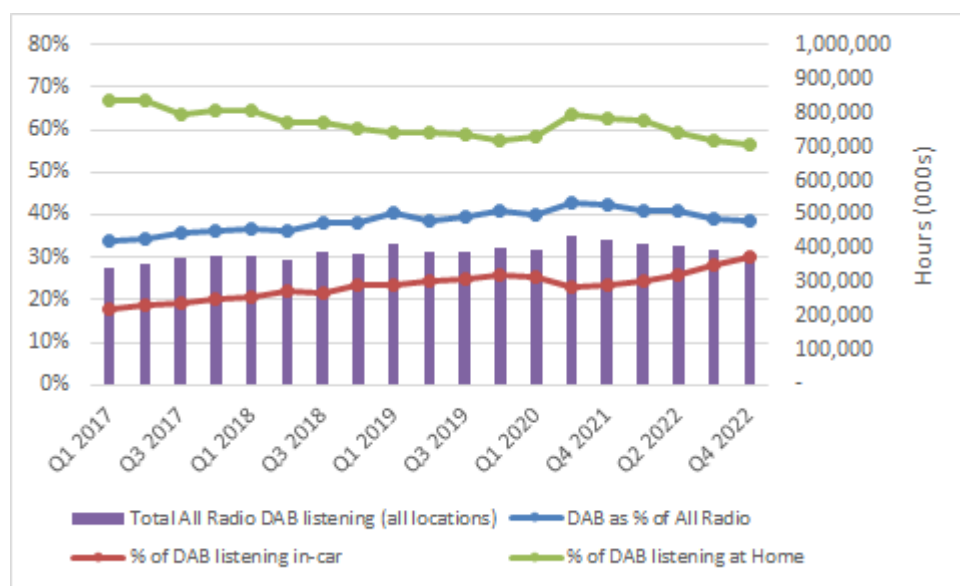
Consultation question 2: Do you have any comments on our proposed changes to the DAB Technical Policy Guidance relating to the process of transmitter approvals? In particular, do you have any comments on our proposed sensitivity analysis, or on whether we should require or permit applicants to provide both horizontal and vertical antenna pattern information?

News Broadcasting welcomes the work Ofcom is doing in terms of assessing the impact of new small-scale DAB multiplex licensees. However, we are concerned proposals to circumvent well-established technical thresholds are not introduced simply to reduce this administrative burden at the ultimate expense of consumers.

In terms of the guideline thresholds Ofcom has set in this consultation, we consider that the proposed in-home threshold of 25 households is broadly acceptable as most households impacted would likely find another location to place their DAB receiver if reception is impacted. Furthermore, should DAB reception be completely lost, there are an array of alternative in-home reception options readily available to consumers (e.g. streaming via home broadband wifi).

Our concerns lie more around the limits being proposed for loss of road coverage and that these may be too large. The chart below illustrates that while we may have witnessed peak DAB listening in Q3 2021, in-car DAB listening remains very much on a growth trajectory.

Chart 1: Analysis of All Radio DAB listening (Q1 2017 to Q4 2022)



Source: RAJAR

Given the growing importance of DAB for in-car reception, allowing new DAB multiplex licensees to punch 400 metre holes in the motorway coverage of existing DAB networks up and down the UK does not sound like an acceptable situation.

Analysis of Department for Transport data undertaken by the Sound Digital national multiplex to address road coverage deficiencies showed that city centre roads have upwards of 20,000 vehicles passing along them every day – over 7.3 million road journeys a year. Punching holes in city centre coverage, however small, will have very significant implications.

Allowing new DAB multiplexes to damage the coverage of existing multiplexes will lead listeners to tune away from one particular radio service. Drivers will not generally appreciate the wider public policy behind the licensing of new community radio multiplexes, for example, and simply understand that their car radio used to work, and now does not. A poor user experience in-car may also

facilitate wider structural damage, lead existing radio listeners to turn away from DAB as a platform for consuming radio full-stop. This will undo a great deal of effort in time and money invested over a considerable number of years by Government, Ofcom, broadcasters, motor manufacturers and consumer device companies to improve and promote the DAB platform.

We believe Ofcom's proposals do not acknowledge this risk. We would therefore welcome further work by Ofcom to assess this risk, and provide some supporting quantitative and qualitative market research evidence as to why it considers "150m of major roads in towns or 400m of major roads in areas where traffic is usually likely to be flowing at the national speed limit" to be acceptable. Given the significant scale of radio listening that potentially could be affected by these proposals, versus the public value created by new licensees, News Broadcasting does not consider these proposals are in the public interest. We would welcome Ofcom undertaking a more thorough cost/benefit analysis to support these proposals.

In terms of Ofcom's proposals to relax the sensitivity analysis, we do not consider Case 3 as a sensible new limit. Spectrum planning models have been developed and refined over many decades in order to provide a high degree of confidence that predicted coverage will translate into robust interference protected reception. We are concerned that this relaxation in established planning standards is simply to circumvent these well-established principles solely that the technical plans of more new DAB multiplex applicants can pass muster, thereby allowing the issuance of more DAB multiplex licences irrespective of the structural damage this might inflict longer-term on consumers and the DAB platform as a whole.

Consultation question 3: Do you have any comments on our proposals for investigating and potentially permitting use of the non-critical mask?

This is a highly technical topic; and we defer to the expertise within our transmission services provider, Arqiva. News Broadcasting is concerned by Arqiva's view that the use of non-critical mask filters is likely to significantly increase the interference to 1st adjacent transmissions, and impair 2nd adjacent frequency usage.

Consultation question 4: Do you have any observations on Ofcom's processes and information we are providing and proposing to provide in relation to acceptance tests and compliance checks? Is there anything missing that would help make the process smoother or easier from your perspective?

News Broadcasting has no observations to make.

Consultation question 5: Do you have any comments on the EMF, HbbTV, or document format modifications proposed in this section?

News Broadcasting has no comments to make on these proposals.

ENDS